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ABSTRACT

Focusing on synthesis--the ability to recognize and create new ideas that subsume and relate to others--as one of the most sophisticated skills writers can attain, the articles in this journal present many ideas for teaching synthesis and a number of classroom approaches that combine the study of English with other fields. The following titles and authors are included: (1) "Cognitive Development through Synthesis" (S. L. Dean); (2) "On the Value of Secondary Sources as Teaching Materials" (M. B. Mandel); (3) "Sit-Com in the Classroom" (T. Capossela); (4) "Beginning at the Beginning: Synthesis and the Research Paper" (B. Allison); (5) "'Today in English We Studied French...': Using Literature to Bridge the Liberal Arts" (J. F. Bonfiglio); (6) "A Review of Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources" (K. W. Lampert); (7) "An Old Way of Thinking New or Synthesis in an Age of Specialization" (T. Dunn); and (8) "Robert Frost and the Teaching of Summary, Synthesis, Critical Analysis, and Research" (R. D. Keller). (JD)

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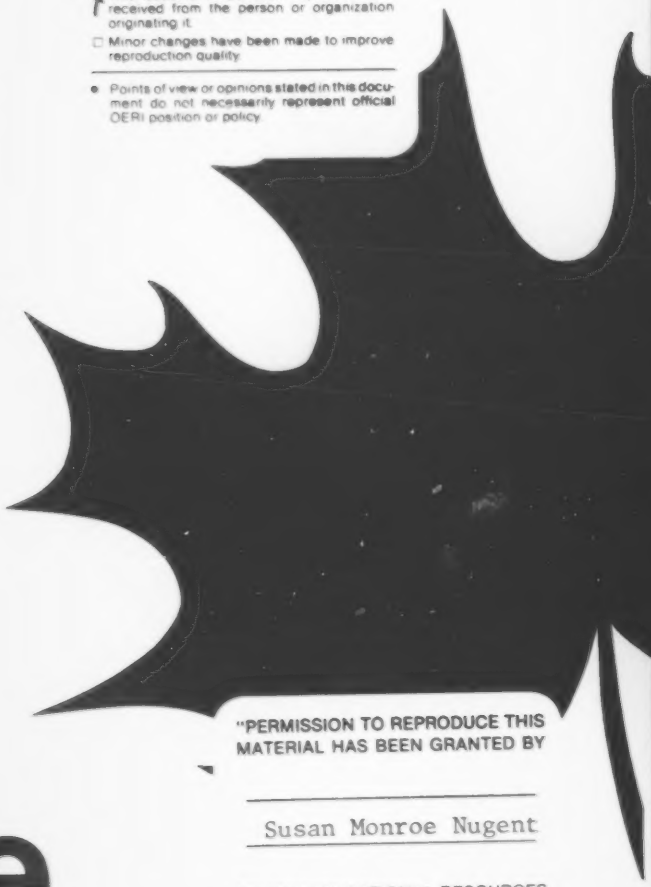

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The Leaflet

Volume 86 Number 1 Winter 1987

Synthesize, Synthesize, Synthesize

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Notes on this issue:

Research and practice show us that synthesis is one of the most sophisticated skills writers can attain. To synthesize requires a writer to recognize and create new ideas that subsume and relate other ones. A new awareness, a new understanding, is significant in synthesis. Research projects provide many opportunities to teach synthesis. Without this skill, research becomes an exercise in quoting and paraphasing, copying someone else's ideas onto a page without purpose or insight.

Yet as teachers, we sometimes assume students know how to synthesize ideas. The articles included within this issue provide many ideas for teaching students to synthesize. Other articles explain classroom approaches that synthesize the study of English with other fields. Each provides a new way for us to consider the subject of synthesis.

Susan Monroe Nugent

Cognitive Development through Synthesis

Sharon L. Dean

Although Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy for cognitive development is now thirty years old, it still enjoys frequent reference and because of its familiarity can serve as a useful way of discussing synthesis. Bloom puts synthesis on level five of his six level cognitive scale, describing it as a skill that requires the ability to draw upon elements from many sources and to put these together into a structure or organization not clearly there before. Synthesis, in Bloom's taxonomy, requires knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis; a person who can synthesize will be prepared to reach the highest cognitive level, evaluation. Bloom's definition of application as the ability to apply material in new situations, however, may be considered synthesis within a smaller context, for it too requires that one draw upon different areas of knowledge in order to make a connection that enables the application. In fact, application may require a higher cognitive level than some levels of synthesis that draw only on closely related material. It may, for example, be more difficult to apply an educational theory to a situation in the classroom than it is to relate its elements with the elements of conflicting theories. But whether or not we accept completely Bloom's taxonomy for cognitive development, those of us who teach secondary and college level students realize that the ability to synthesize is one of the most difficult cognitive skills our students have to learn. To help students with synthesis, many of us provide situations that ask them to integrate material from several printed sources and, perhaps, from non-printed sources as well. While most of our exercises and assignments undoubtedly have merit, we may increase their usefulness if we define different kinds of synthesis and design tasks where we know exactly what kind of synthesis we are asking for.

I like to think about synthesis on a sliding scale of difficulty. At its least complex level, a synthesis task asks a writer to weave together material from different sources so that the material suits the writer's unique purpose; at its most complex, it enables a writer to accept and reject nuggets from old ideas in order to arrive at a new idea. An average student writing a research paper often engages only in simple synthesis. The student might read available material on causes of schizophrenia, integrate these causes, and decide that the best evidence suggests that schizophrenia is

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rooted in chemical abnormalities of the brain. Unlike the student, a professional researcher practices a far more complex task of synthesis. One such researcher, psychologist Julian Jaynes, sees the origin of schizophrenia in what he calls the bicameral mind, an evolutionary stage that predates the development of consciousness in the human species. In this early mind, Jaynes theorizes, the two speech-associated areas of the brain, located in opposite hemispheres, worked separately, with one side functioning as a directive voice telling the other side what to do. Jaynes's theory is complex, intriguing, disturbing, but the point I want to make is that he had to synthesize tremendous amounts of information from psychology, linguistics, anthropology, classical history, religion, and more, not just to justify his theory but also to have thought of it in the first place. Few of us will ever achieve this sort of elaborate and creative synthesis, but even the student writing the research paper on schizophrenia might arrive at something more than an acceptance of theory. She might, for example, know an art student who claims that his dreams dictate the progress of his paintings, might have read Coleridge's account of his dream vision of "Kubla Khan," and might herself have had an out-of-body experience. All this could lead her to recognize that insanity and creativity have much in common and that chemical signals in the brain promote creativity as well as what we call mental illness, a term she may begin to question. If this student continues to research, she will probably find authoritative support for her ideas, but still, she has engaged in complex synthesis prior to finding authoritative renforcement.

It is easily apparent that complex synthesis requires greater cognitive leaps than simple synthesis; however, we should not minimize the importance of or underestimate the difficulty of simple synthesis. In terms of writing skills, simple synthesis may, in fact, make greater demands on style than complex synthesis, for in its closer reliance on sources it continually forces the writer to find ways of documenting without awkwardness. To help our students with all levels of synthesis, we need to devise our own exercises and assignments, for few textbooks address ways of developing this skill. Instruction in synthesis is not part of the aim of standard handbooks: of the eight within easy reach of my desk, none lists synthesis in its glossary. Rhetorics, texts focusing on the writing process, and even texts devoted to writing across the curriculum also do not provide instruction in synthesis: of the fifteen I looked at, only two mentioned synthesis, one in about fifty words of advice on the kinds of questions that could help a student synthesize ideas and one in an example of how to choose between two opposing viewpoints. Some of the newer texts that

emphasize writing from sources do spend substantial time instructing students in techniques for synthesizing. But even the best discussion of synthesis I have seen differentiates between simple and complex synthesis on the basis of the number of sources the task involves rather than on the basis of cognitive difficulty. Unless we are teaching a course in research writing we are unlikely to use a text devoted solely to writing from sources, and so we are left to our own creativity to develop useful material.

We can readily develop useful exercises to help with simple synthesis by presenting students with excerpts from closely related readings. One that I often use asks students to read the excerpted reviews of a book in *Book Review Digest*. Since the *Digest* also provides synopses of books, students need not have read the book I choose for them to work on. I do, however, try to choose a book that has some current interest--*The Color Purple*, for example--and one whose reviews are geared to a general reader. Students then have to provide a summary of the critical reception of the book, their audience a hypothetical class gathering a list of books they can refer to for future reading. As simple as it sounds, this exercise alway makes me realize how many skills the ability to synthesize requires. Students must be able to interpret the code of *Book Review Digest* (Bloom's *knowledge* and *comprehension*). They must make choices about organizing material (Bloom's *analysis*), and may try unsuccessfully to follow the order in the *Digest* instead of choosing a more appropriate pattern such as grouping positive and negative reviews. They must be able to signal the shift from one review to another, providing a logical reason for the shift; that is, they must tag their material with something like a reviewer's name and they must practice transitions. Finally, they must be able to paraphrase or quote accurately and to shape their style for the defined audience and purpose (Bloom's *application* and *analysis*). The fact that many of my students do not do very well with this exercise confirms my belief that simple synthesis is not so simple. I know I could help my students be more successful with this assignment by providing more initial instruction; however, I like to use this as an ungraded exercise that forces them to discover their own options or to learn from not having seen what those options are.

While the best kinds of tools for simple synthesis are pieces that deal with similar subjects, more disparate sources can help students engage in complex synthesis. My colleague Bonnie Sunstein and I have developed assignments around education, leisure, art, and observation and learning. Let me illustrate with my assignment on observation and learning, one that takes about three weeks to complete. Students begin by reading four seemingly

unrelated essays: "How Children Form Mathematical Concepts" by Jean Piaget; "My Built in Doubter" by Isaac Asimov; "Anthrolpology and Thick Description" by Clifford Geertz; and "Joey: A 'Mechanical Boy' " by Bruno Bettelheim. Accompanying each essay is a sheet with about half a dozen questions: What steps of observation does Piaget go through? (Piaget); What can you say about the relationship between observation, doubt, and learning? (Azimov); What does "thick description" have to do with observation and learning? (Geertz); Would it be easier for you to learn about Joey by observing him yourself rather than through Bettelheim's descriptions? (Bettelheim). The questions all point the student beyond the content of the essay toward insights I hope they will gain about the role of observation in learning. Once they have responded to these questions, we spend class time or group time sharing findings. Students must also conduct their own observation experiment to share with the class. Some observe something familiar without preparing notes on what to look for in advance; some do the same, but take notes in advance on what to look for. Others observe something unfamiliar, either with or without notes, and I always ask a few to observe through a sense other than sight. While all this reading, observing, and sharing are going on, students are beginning to generate paper topics that in some way address the topic of what it means to be an observer and a learner. Because I want students to see that what they have read and done fieldwork on has bearing on what they are writing, I ask that they refer to at least two of the essays and to their experiment in their papers (I do make exceptions if this kind of reference seems inappropriate for the way the student has chosen to address the assignment). This also forces the student to practice the more technical skills of summarizing and crediting sources that are so important in synthesis. Aside from this restriction, students can approach the topic in any way they want, and I have received papers ranging from summaries about the advantages and limitations of using observation to learn to papers on how a Down's syndrome child uses observation to learn, on how observation can lead to negative as well as positive learning, and on how children observe television without exercising the need to doubt. One foreign student even applied the concept of observation to her social bloopers when first coming to the United States.

Using a synthesis assignment that depends on seemingly unrelated sources demands that teachers get control of their patience and nerves for the duration of the assignment. Students are confused at first because they do not know where the sources

can possibly lead them. But the confusion, I tell them, is good confusion and eventually they emerge from it discovering that synthesizing ideas can mean making connections in new and startling ways. I do not, however, want to propose that my assignments are without limitations. For the most part, I have led the students to see connections that I see, and this is far different from students making their own unguided connections. In a very real way, students tend to discover my thinking instead of their own. However this kind of an assignment that guides students through complex synthesis can advance them toward a higher cognitive level that will help them approach more independent tasks with greater technical ease and with greater depth.

One type of more independent task available to us as English teachers is the paper on literature. Rarely do we accept summaries that illustrate mere knowledge and comprehension of literature. Perhaps we cling to our commitment to literature not just because we love it, but because we see its advantages for helping students climb the scale toward complex synthesis. Because literature does not provide easy and clear answers, it is an ideal medium to nudge students beyond knowledge and comprehension. The study of literature asks students to practice application by drawing generalizations from the text and to practice analysis by seeing the way parts of the work relate to the whole. When we ask students to practice application or analysis within the context of a single piece of literature, we are also asking them to synthesize points in the text that connect to things like a character trait or an image pattern or a theme. Further, their readings must always be shaped by how they synthesize what they know of literary texts with the new text before them and shaped by their own life experiences.

When we ask students to deal with more than one piece of literature, we specifically ask them to practice some level of synthesis. At the least complex level, assignments that ask students to compare, for example, a Faulkner story with one by Hawthorne may be arbitrary and not very meaningful unless a student is prepared to develop a thesis about why Faulkner was so influenced by Hawthorne, an example of complex synthesis that requires more knowledge than most students can be expected to have. On the other hand, even a simple synthesis here would require a student to sort out the issues in the two stories and to make the distinctions between the stories clear to his audience. Because reader response to literature affords large variety, we can also use literature to help students discover their own thinking about an issue instead of ours. Synthesizing what several stories by the

same or different authors have to say about the nature of freedom, or justice, or guilt, or whatever, can force a student to become engaged in both independent and complex synthesis by seeing a concept in a newer and deeper way.

All of us must guage our assignments to the types of courses we teach and the types of students we have in those courses. I have illustrated assignments on both simple and complex synthesis not to be copied--even I cannot use my observing and learning assignment again because I am changing textbooks--but to suggest that all synthesis tasks are not alike. By offering assignments that help with both simple and complex synthesis in wide varieties of contexts, we can help students develop strategies for improving their clarity, their style, and their thinking.

References

Bloom, Benjamin S. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain.* New York: Longmans, 1956.

Jaynes, Julian. *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.

* * *

On the Value of Secondary Sources as Teaching Materials

Miriam B. Mandel

Most freshman English courses--and a great many junior and senior high school courses--in writing and composition include a literary text (a primary source), such as a short story, a poem, a play, or even a novel. These literary texts are analyzed and discussed in the classroom; they also serve as the basis for one or more student essays. Most such English courses, however, do not include any critical materials (secondary sources). The freshman English program, usually a service course to the entire university, must serve a broad student population; the syllabus is always crowded, with many written assignments and, usually, some library work. Secondary sources, whether they are scholarly or not, which analyze the language, structure, symbolism, etc. of a particular literary text are, quite understandably, seldom seen in the first-year curriculum. As a matter of fact, in fifteen years of teaching freshman English at three different universities, I never taught a syllabus which offered such a secondary source for classroom work.

My recent experience in a first-year writing program which does advocate the use of critical materials, however, prompts me to suggest to those teaching the basics of composition and writing to college freshmen (or to college-bound high school seniors) that the shorter critical essay--as short as a three- or four-paragraph note in *The Explicator,* for example--is a fine teaching tool, serving a multiplicity of functions. I would even argue that it is preferable to use a shorter literary text, like a poem or a short story, with a critical article, than a longer literary text without an article.

The critical article, as I've used it and as I recommend it here, is not an adjunct to the literary text, but a separate teaching tool, an independent addition to the curriculum. It is not a short cut to the understanding of the primary text, and it need not--indeed, it should not--change the nature of the student's work on the primary text. Traditional class discussion and analysis, as well as all the written assignments based on the literary text, should be completed as usual before the new unit, based on the critical text, is introduced. The distinction, the separation, between literary text and critical article is important: the literary text and the critical article should not be made available to the student simultaneously.

If the article is read before the student has had the chance to develop some ideas of her own about the literary text, she will

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probably be convinced by the argument presented in the article, and her interpretive capabilities would be stifled, rather than broadened. She might even think that the critical article is offered to her to make sure that she knows what the "right" interpretation of the story is; if her own ideas about the story differ from those presented in the critical article, she might well reject them as being "wrong." It is necessary, therefore, that the student read the story or poem, think about it, discuss it in the classroom, and turn in all the written assignments (plot summary, character sketch, etc.) before being exposed to the critical article. The critical article, although obviously connected to the story or poem, is not a part of the pedagogical unit based on the story or poem, but forms the basis of a separate pedagogical unit, generating its own class discussion and written assignments. As such, it is useful in three separate ways: to teach writing skills, to sharpen reading skills, and to introduce research methods.

To Teach Writing Skills

For the teaching of writing skills, the critical article is useful as a model essay. First and most obviously, it is a polished piece of expository writing. Second, the shortness of the article has forced the author to concentrate, to write more pointedly, and to use every rhetorical device to fullest advantage. Third, and most important for our pedagogical purposes, the article will strike a responsive chord in the student. Having already struggled with her own plot summary, character sketch, or interpretive essay, the student will be both more critically alert and more sympathetic to the efforts of another writer who is involved in a similar effort. The *subject* of the critical article (the short story or poem) is already well-known to the student; the *argument* of the critical article (the particular point being made about plot, character, language, symbolism, or whatever) is also familiar to the student, who has herself written a similar essay or essays; and the *purpose* of the critical article (to convince the reader that this particular analysis or interpretation is valid) is, similarly, a purpose which the student herself has already attempted to achieve. Whether or not the student agrees with the argument proposed by the critic is irrelevant; what is relevant is that the student sees someone else, an expert, a professional, doing something similar to what she has already done: writing a paper about a story. Because the subject matter, argument, and purpose are already familiar to the student, she will grasp the content of the article easily and will be free to concentrate not on what the author is saying, but on how he is saying it. The critical article, whatever

its argument, now becomes a model essay, from which the student can learn something about the techniques of introducing, defining, and supporting an argument--in short, can learn to write a convincing, intelligent paper.

In my experience, the students will need very little prompting to bring up for discussion just those items which every teacher of composition wants to emphasize. Not only topic sentences, introductions, conclusions, and transitions, but also the quality, quantity, and organization of the evidence invariably come up in class discussion. Matters of style and effectiveness in writing surface spontaneously: I have found, for example, that students have no difficulty in noticing--indeed, they delight in pointing out--that even in a short article, the main idea is stated more than once. I have refereed many a heated argument about repetition and wordiness as opposed to restatement and emphasis. Because everyone is an "expert" on the story and has recently been involved in a similar effort, class discussion draws in even those who generally abstain from debate. And whether they attack or defend the critical article, all of the students are discussing rhetorical strategies. Discussion is invariably lively and to the point: the students are teaching themselves.

Written assignments on the critical article generally develop naturally from class discussion. Typical assignments have been: summary of the article; evaluation of the article; comparison of two articles (I prefer to work with more than one article) or of the critical article and a sample student essay; analysis of the critic's argument (is it logical? complete? well-supported?) or of the evidence (where does it come from? from the story, from other stories by the same author, from other authors, from other critics, from other disciplines? what kind of evidence is more convincing? why?); organization of the article (perhaps including an outline) or of the evidence (in what order is it presented? cumulative? climactic? etc.) Students suggest additional topics and, more than once, have turned back to their own essays after having examined the critical article and written about it: they ask to be allowed to rewrite their original essays on the primary text, not in order to change their arguments (to which they generally become more committed as discussion progresses), but to sharpen the presentation of their own arguments, by applying techniques "newly discovered" in the criticism. The resulting improved essay is my strongest assurance that the critical text has been a successful tool for the teaching of writing.

To Sharpen Reading Skills

The short critical article can also be used to help the student become a more sophisticated reader of primary texts. Very often, such an article, dealing with a very particular detail of the primary text, will bring home to the student the importance of reading carefully, of paying attention to details, and will enhance her appreciation of the primary text by pointing out new approaches or new possibilities. If, as I recommend, the short critical article is introduced after the student has completed her own oral and written work on the primary text, the student will have a fine opportunity for distinguishing between (1) what she can do by herself and (2) what can be done by a more experienced, more skillful reader. Next time she reads a story, or any primary text, she will very probably incorporate the new approach she learned from the critical article into the category of things she can do by herself when analyzing a text.

When I used Hemingway's excellent and very short story, "Hills Like White Elephants," for example, my students had little difficulty producing summaries, character descriptions (physical and psychological), and analyses of the relationship between the two characters, of the symbolism of the title, and of the scenery described in the story. I made a point of asking if there was anything anyone wished to add to our work on the story before we turned to the critical articles, but the students felt that, after quite a bit of class discussion and three written assignments, they had exhausted the story. They were all the more impressed, therefore, with the two very short and very effective articles dealing with the bead curtain which I asked them to read. The connection between the bead curtain and Catholicism (with its ban of abortion), its suggestion of children's toys, and its function as a divider between the girl's and the man's worlds had simply not been noticed by the students; they had simply taken the bead curtain for granted, assuming it to be a realistic background detail. As one student put it, "Just when you think you've finished with the story, that's the time to read it again." I was equally pleased by another comment, which revealed such a positive attitude to the contribution criticism can make to our understanding of literature: "There's always someone who knows more than you do, and who can help you understand." A well-chosen secondary text will bring home very clearly to the students that there are many steps to the understanding of a primary text. This is a valuable lesson for all students to learn, whatever their discipline.

One semester, as a class exercise, we compiled a list of the

many steps we had taken toward a more perfect understanding of the primary text. The class produced the following list: what we learned (1) from reading the story
(2) from writing a summary of the story
(3) from class discussion
(4) from hearing assignment possibilities
(5) from the written assignments
(6) from the critical article
(7) from class discussion of the critical article

The written assignments on the critical article, the class generally agreed, helped them to understand "things about writing" but were not seen to be relevant to an understanding of the story itself--which underlines the importance of the critical article, the secondary source, as a tool for the teaching of writing. Sharpening reading skills, although a desirable goal, is a happy by-product of the original aim: teaching the student to write a convincing and intelligent piece of expository prose.

To Introduce Research Skills

Finally, the short critical article can be used to teach the student something about research methods, thus looking forward to the research or library paper with which the student's first year of composition usually ends. Although this is not a function I would emphasize for high school students, I do think that first year university students benefit from looking closely at how a professional handles situations which will inevitably crop up later in their own work. Such situations apply to all students, whatever their majors; eventually they will all have to quote gracefully from a primary text, refer to secondary sources, and produce footnotes and bibliographies.

Students tend to pay more sympathetic attention to footnotes and bibliographies when it is pointed out to them that these are really shortcuts in research. One article which is relevant to their topic, whatever it may be, literary or scientific, will supply them several more titles. They can be shown how to take advantage of the research already done by the author, whether or not they agree with his premises or conclusions. Doing a library paper seems a less formidable project once the student is shown how research leads to research, how one article leads to many others. This is a valuable lesson and applies to all majors and all disciplines.

In short, then, the critical article seems to me too valuable a tool to be omitted from the curriculum. I have used such articles successfully in conjunction with two very short stories of Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" and "The Killers," and

with one longer story, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." I include an annotated bibliography of useful short articles, for teachers who might be interested in attempting this approach with their classes.

Assignment Sources:

Primary Source: Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants"

Secondary Sources:

Elliott, Gary D. "Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants.'" *Explicator*, 35 (Summer 1977), 22-23.
Sees the curtain as a type of rosary, symbolizing the girl's religion and her reluctance to abort.

Kobler, J.F. "Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants.'" *Explicator*, 38, No. 4 (1980), 6-7.
Discusses the curtain: "it reflects their attitudes toward the never named central issue of the story: the abortion (p.7). Curtain and abortion are unimportant to him; she responds more deeply to both. Concludes that she will not have the abortion: "'I feel fine.'"

Organ, Dennis. "Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants.'" *Explicator*, 37, No. 4 (1979), 11.
"The curtain symbolizes the clashing desires of the two main characters--the girl's desire to give birth...and the man's desire to continue their pattern of life together by terminating the pregnancy." Seen as strings of beads, the curtain reminds the girl of a baby's toy. Seen as an ad for a drink, it stands for the status quo. "They regard it as differently as they do the more familiar symbol of the hills."

Trilling, Lionel. *The Experience of Literature: A Reader with Commentaries*. Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1967. Pp. 729-732.
Slightlty longer than the *Explicator* items, this essay is also broader in scope, dealing with the simile in the title, the description of the scenery, and Hemingway's style and diction. It is, therefore, less useful for our purposes.

Weeks, Lewis E. "Hemingway's Hills: Symbolism in 'Hills Like White Elephants." *Studies in Short Fiction*, 17 (1980), 75-77.
Offers several readings of the central symbol. The white hills (elephants) can represent (1) any large unwanted object, (2) a pregnant woman, and (3) the sacred beast in Buddhist thought.

. . . . . .

Sit-Com in the Classroom

Toni-Lee Capossela

Although many literature professors are probably closet TV watchers, few feel that they should bring their viewing habits, or those of their students, into the classroom. Nevertheless, I have found situation comedies to be an unlikely but sturdy platform on which to build preliminary discussion of the elements of drama with my freshman comp-lit. students.

I made this discovery one semester when I went over the brief questionnaires I pass out during the first meeting, and saw that in a class of 70, I didn't have a single literature major, and that there were only a few liberal arts majors. This fact made me doubly aware of the importance of the course: for most of these students, it would be their only literature course in four years. But it also filled me with anxiety: how could I persuade them that literature was anything more than an arcane and inexplicable interest of mine? How could I show them that it was related to their lives too? I was especially concerned about the grenre of drama, because reading a play presents unique challenges, and can be formidable for students who have not done it before and are not familiar with live drama.

The play in our textbook that I planned to use was Lady Gregory's *The Workhouse Ward,* which is short, simple, touching, and hilarious; but I didn't know how to help the students appreciate its structure without spoiling the fun of it.

As I read the editor's description of the elements of drama, and applied them more or less automatically to the Gregory play, I suddenly recognized this pattern as it existed in a non-threatening, non-academic setting, a setting which my students surely knew well, and which they probably considered their turf rather than mine: the half-hour weekly situation comedy.

At the beginning of the next session, I gave them their first writing assignment: to use an episode from a situation comedy they had recently seen, and to analyze it in terms of its dramatic components: to identify and describe the plot, the protagonist, the exposition, the complication, the climax, and the rising and falling action. The results were gratifying. The students, long-standing aficionados of the shows they wrote about, discussed their subjects with assurance. There was some groping and fumbling with the new vocabulary, but it was being used, tried on, and adjusted to suit the occasion. Writers were willing to read their essays aloud, and there were spirited discussions among those who had

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seen the same episode and disagreed about the nature of the complication or the climax. The students were also delighted that I obviously succumbed to the seductions of their favorite programs when I was in the privacy of my home (I was not yet sufficiently confident to own up to a truly obsessive devotion to *Hill Street Blues*).

After thus demystifying the new vocabulary, we proceeded successfully through *The Workhouse Ward* and on to *Oedipus Rex*, which I had chosen partly because Peter Arnott was presenting his brilliant puppet version of *Oedipus* on our campus that semester. In addition, I showed the class a televised BBC production of *Oedipus;* in short, the drama unit turned into a multi-media event.

Working inductively and trying to account for the success of the sit-com assignment on general principles, I realized that as an exercise it exhibits several characteristics of sound pedagogy. First, in the spirit of James Brittion, it invites students to begin with an area of personal interest (an expressive subject), and then prods them, by the nature of the question asked, to turn in the direction of transactional writing or academic discourse (19), still grasping the old familiar material for security and a sense of expertise. Second, in the spirit of Ann Berthoff, it "starts with where they are" (9); in this case, where they are is deeply involved in all kinds of audio-visual experience, yet desirous of mastering the verbal skills which a college degree both requires and --ideally--testifies to. Third, in the spirit of Paolo Freire, who observes that teaching occurs not "from the top down, but only from the inside out" (48), it allows students to teach themselves by working with new vocabulary in a milieu they already understand--in addition, I suspect that the vocabulary will whisper inside the student's head, at least subliminally, every time he or she watches a sit-com from now on. Fourth, in the spirit of Lee Odell, this approach is extremely useful in answering questions and solving problems. Understanding the elements of drama gives the students a theoretical base for their own sound instincts and responses. Many episodes they found unsuccessful could be diagnosed as violations of some aspect of the formula: either a minor character was made a protagonist and could not bear the load, the complication was too involved to resolve in a coherent and convincing way before the final commercial, or the show got bogged down in subplots and changes of venue, gave short shrift to the essential ingredients, and disappointed audience expectation.

Although the idea of using TV shows to teach literature and writing may raise the spectre of pandering to mediocrity and blur-

ring the distinction between great art and commercial entertainment, the sit-com assignment has the opposite effect. By writing about it, my students realize that after putting the characters through their compulsory paces, there is no room left in the thirty-minute time frame for anything else. The name of sit-com defines its limitations: the easy, uncomplicated laughs come from the situation, which can be gerry-built and dismantled quickly and efficiently each week, but which cannot include the luxuries of detail, nuance, ambiguity, or fully developed characters.

For that, you still need literature.

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Beginning at the Beginning: Synthesis and the Research Paper

Barbara Allison

When my son was a senior in high school, I happened upon him copying, more or less happily, column after column from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He thought he was writing a research paper on Willa Cather (a paper innocent of quotation marks or documentation) and assured me that this method was not only correct but potentially profitable. Surely, what the encyclopaedia had to say was "A"-worthy. I made him do it right. "Right" earned him a "D." When we were on speaking terms once again, he gave his version of the formal instruction he had received in the methods of research: an hour's lecture on the use of the reference section in the library and an assignment to read ten pages in the back of a handbook. I do not excuse him, but I do offer him as my own horrible example of what can happen when instructors assume much of anything about students' sophistication in research techniques.

We are all familiar with this problem. I know of large universities which have abandoned the teaching of research papers in freshman composition. (These same universities complain, now, about the quality of research in graduate courses.) It seems no one can find a place to start. I believe we have a responsibility to do the obvious, to start at the beginning in our freshman courses. In an attempt to remain an honest academic, I have disciplined myself to make time in my own syllabi for several weeks of instruction concerning the assembly of the research paper. These sessions are not consumed by lectures on the intricacies of documentation, for the 1984 MLA guidelines have simplified that task. Instead, I spend most of the time scheduled for instruction in the research paper teaching students how to synthesize and formally present a primary source, several secondary sources, and their own insights in support of an original thesis.

The heart of my technique is an adaptation of the casebook approach, as those who were teaching in the Sixties, when casebooks were popular, will recognize. Several years ago, when I confronted in the classroom the same kind of naiveté I had unhappily witnessed at home, I began to collect excerpts from articles on opposing sides of controversial issues. I distributed these excerpts to my classes, asked the students to choose a position on the issue, to articulate that position, then to support it by paraphrasing and quoting from the material in front of them. They

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were at liberty to include in these exercises their own opinions, as well. As the semesters passed, I began writing my own "excerpts" so that I could achieve quickly the balance of opinions I wanted and so that I could tailor my technique to matters literary, since I found that the language of much literary criticism was beyond freshmen and since I did not want to abandon, irresponsibly, the literary research paper. I appended to these short compositions scrambled and putative facts of publication so that students would eventually be able to document their mini papers.[1]

These truncated casebook exercises are not now a final solution, for they no longer represent a beginning. Students cannot easily formulate a thesis to be supported in a mini paper, especially a thesis about a work of literature. For one thing, they cannot distinguish between literary fact and opinion. In a statement such as the following, " 'A Road Not Taken' compares moving through one's whole life to an autumn walk in the woods" (Allison and Chasteen 10), few students are able to see that an interpretation is being advanced. Nor can many students, once they do formulate a thesis, use it authentically to structure their papers. Even fewer students are able to paraphrase material accurately. These skills must be addressed before an instructor introduces the packets of excerpts, and the key to teaching such skills is a focus on synthesis. Only after students have learned that research is fundamentally process can the *MLA Handbook* help them with that which is fundamentally stasis, the forms and mechanics of documentation. It is this focus on the process of synthesizing which I feel is innovative. Indeed, as will shortly become apparent, my coauthor and I have revived some time-honored, if not hoary, apparatuses in the name of innovation.

With respect to the thesis statement, I initially pursue with my students the differences among theses, facts, and announcements. It is only prudent, as well, to state the importance of being specific, unified and coherent once students have grasped what it means to find a point to prove. After these stages have been successfully negotiated, the issue of synthesis arises. Many students have no idea of how to organize a proof. To aid them, I ask that they formulate a tripartite thesis from a premliminary thesis statement. "Creon is the true protagonist of *Antigone*," for example, becomes, "Creon is the true protagonist of *Antigone* because his qualitites match those of the tragic hero described by Aristotle: possession of essential nobility, exhibition of a fatal flaw, and acquisition of self-knowledge" (Allison and Chasteen 16).

My purpose is to show students, mechanically, that one idea (Creon is the protagonist of *Antigone*) is a synthesis of three

proofs (possession of essential nobility, exhibition of a fatal flaw, and acquisition of self-knowledge). That is, in the standard short freshman paper, the first two pages are devoted to a statement of the thesis and to the first third of the proof; the second page and a half, to the second proof; the last two pages, to the final proof and summary. I stress that the three parts are a means, not an end, that the three proofs, in other words, are mechanical device to ensure a synthesis of points in support of a thesis.

This method eliminates certain kinds of problems which have become all too familiar. Half a paper fleshed out with irrelevant biography, pages of plot summary no longer cross my desk. There will still be students, however, who resist this structure primarily because they run out of things to say within that structure. These students need to be reminded that additional examples are almost always relevant. Other difficulties with the tripartite thesis typically involve balance among the three proofs. Before approving a thesis, instructors should make certain that a student really has three discrete proofs. "Creon is the true protagonist of *Antigone* because he possesses essential nobility, because he is a good man, and because he acquires self-knowledge" will not work, for instance, because of the duplication in the first two proofs. Also, students should be pressed to demonstrate that they can generate enough ideas to write sections of comparable length.

Paraphrasing presents itself naturally as an exercise in synthesis because it is essentially a joining of others' ideas with our own words, and recent experience has taught me that paraphrasing is one of the most difficult research skills for students to master. I once was able to assume that when I stipulated the use of three secondary sources in a paper, I would receive a reasonable mix of paraphrased and quoted material. As I indicated earlier, few assumptions remain safe, a principle demonstrated when a student submitted a five-page paper to me, three pages of which consisted entirely of blocked quotations, one page of quotations intended to represent each of the three required sources. Short exercises on paraphrasing were obviously not making an impression, so I began to assign the précis as the next step after the thesis.

The struggle students have with writing the précis suggests how much they need this exercise. When confronted with a three-page essay to be reduced to a two-hundred-word summary, students sometimes merely copy the first and last sentences of the paragraphs in the original. Sometimes, they include their own ideas. Occasionally, they distort, to the point of misrepresentation, the author's ideas. Almost always, they fail to detect and to

articulate the major points of the original.

It usually takes two rigorously graded exercises in the précis to show students how to achieve original expression of alien ideas. They must first be initiated into the fine art of the précis: reading the original carefully, putting it aside so that particularly felicitous phrases will fade from memory, and checking the summary against the original so that these phrases do not unintentionally re-appear, so that distorted attributions do not occur. I suggest a straightforward essay with obvious transitions for the first summary, a structurally more complex essay for the second. It is also ultimately helpful to students if this second essay contain controversial material. In such a situation, they cannot easily avoid the issue of fair representation, and they begin to understand how exacting a task successful paraphrasing represents when they must use their own words to convey ideas with which they disagree.

Throughout this rigorous process, instructors should remind students of where the précis fits in the sequence of research so that the exercise does not become isolated. Like the three-part proof, the précis is a means, not an end, a means to accurate paraphrasing. In my experience it is safe to introduce the mechanics of presenting quoted material only after students can demonstrate some skill in paraphrasing. And then I am careful to state that paraphrasing and quoting must be integrated if the final paper is to manifest the synthesis of ideas I have been dangling before my classes.

After writing two précis, most students are ready to apply what they have learned about summarizing to exercises more specific to research. After a discussion of the MLA guidelines for parenthetical documentation and for the mechanics of quoting, I distribute a paragraph for which facts of publication have been supplied and ask students to compose the following responses to that paragraph: a sentence of paraphrased material, a sentence of paraphrased and quoted material, a blocked quotation, a quotation requiring ellipsis, and a quotation requiring single quotation marks. Students must provide parenthetical documentation for all these responses.

I have learned patience from grading this exercise. I have received paraphrases tricked out in ellipses, blocked quotations without benefit of lead-ins, short quotations with arbitrary ellipses rendering them senseless (According to Finstrom, "Many of . . . predictions"). I have rarely received, however, plagiarized material or factually distorted material because writing the précis has at least taught students to use their own words accurately in the service of someone else's theories.

To a particularly resistant class, I assign another exercise at this juncture. The second exercise consists of a mixture of correct and incorrect paraphrases and quotations from yet another paragraph, responses which students are asked to evaluate and correct. Instructors can here test students' understanding of the mechanics of parenthetical documentation and presentation of quoted material, as well as their dedication to the larger principle of responsible summary. Does the period go inside or outside the quotation marks? Do parentheses come before or after the period? Should there be three or four dots in a given ellipsis? It is better to settle these matters now then in a graduate seminar on the Renaissance lyric.

Important as the formulation and presentation of the tri-partite thesis, paraphrases, and quotations are, they remain a prelude to the solution of the actual problem confronting inexperienced students: how to synthesize sources, accurately paraphrased or quoted, with original opinions in order to prove an original point. The 1984 *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, although it devotes an introductory chapter to "a brief review of the steps often outlined for writing," does not really address the problem synthesis of material presents to the novice. A student could progress from step five to step eight in this outline, could "gather . . . ideas and information in a premliminary list," and "write a preliminary draft" (5) and still turn out a paper little more satisfactory than my son's effort on Willa Cather. If, after all, such a student reasons, I "gather" ideas from the encyclopaedia, outline them, and copy them in my preliminary draft, wherein have I transgressed? If students read the rest of the first chapter in the *MLA Handbook*, they may take seriously the enjoinder against plagiarism and provide quotation marks for the material from the encyclopaedia. Their subsequent mystification at their "D's" and "F's" is perhaps justifiable. I do not discount the value of outlining and note-taking, of learning how to use the reference section in the library. I do dispute that instruction in these areas is adequate if pursued in isolation. Average students in our classrooms today need practice in combining materials they have learned to assemble in support of a thesis, and it is this practice which the *MLA Handbook* and other texts on writing research papers fail to provide because they often make huge and unwarranted assumptions about students' experience and preparation.

My solution is the mini-paper technique briefly described at the beginning of this essay. I find that six paragraphs supplied with facts of publication provide a reasonable number of "sources" from which students can gather material in support of an original

thesis. In our workbook, Professor Chasteen and I have assembled such units on soap operas, Faulkner's "Wash," and Carson McCullers' "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." Most students seem to need at least three experiences with the mini paper in order successfully to combine sources in their ultimate "real" papers. We are quite specific in our instructions. The mini papers must be five paragraphs long. The first paragraph must advance a tripartite thesis. Students must begin each of the three body paragraphs with a topic sentence related to one of the three proofs, then support that topic sentence with documented paraphrases of and quotations from the six sources. For our exercises, students are required to watch a few soap operas (if such a requirement is not redundant), to read "Wash" and "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." so that they will have the bases for original comments, as well. Finally, students write a short paragraph, re-stating the thesis, as their conclusion.

It is helpful, whether instructors compose their own excerpts or collect secondary materials as sources for the mini papers, to indicate to students the probable topics which will yield theses from these sources. For example, our six sources concerning "Wash" have been designed so that students could advance theses about issues over which critics disagree, about central symbols in the story, or about the illusions entertained by various characters. We do not formulate theses for students; we simply list topics under the heading of "Hints" at the beginning of each section of the workbook which presents a mini paper.[2] Typical freshmen have little experience in reading works of literature, less in reading criticism. It is a revelation to such students, for example, that critics could offer opposed interpretations of a short story.

Careful grading of the mini papers is essential if students are to transfer these synthesizing skills to longer research papers. Here is the place to spot plagiarism, unintentional and, alas, intentional, the place to insist on a balance of original, paraphrased, and quoted material. Relieved of the pressures of library searches, complicated literary criticism, and twelve-hundred-word requirements, students can achieve this balance with integrity. They are also afforded three opportunities to hone skills of documentation since the putative facts of publication give the information necessary for lead-ins, parenthetical documentation, and a list of works cited. And, rather than waiting until we see these students in our graduate seminars, we can mention in the context of the mini papers such delicate (from the students' point of view) matters as the use of the present tense for literary analysis, avoidance of titles with lead-ins (No, class, it is not considered polite to precede *any* critic's name with "Miss"), and inappropriate tone (Do

you think, Ms. Roughgarden, that you might find a *formal* equivalent for "Lear is screwed over by his daughters"?).

This process does consume a seemingly inordinate amount of time, in and out of class. If we want students to continue writing research papers, however, it seems that the current issue is not if the time should be spent, but when. If instructors are bound by departmental syllabi, it would be possible to adapt the mini-paper approach to a shorter length of time by treating the last exercise as a final paper. Students could be sent to the library for additional research on Faulkner or McCullers. The five paragraphs could be expanded to five pages, each body paragraph in short exercise becoming a page and a half in the longer essay.

Whether students are required to write three mini papers and a longer formal paper, or two mini papers and an expanded version of the third, they will still need instruction in traditional research skills. Using the library, note-taking, outlining, and documentation are matters which have long received ample and expert attention. They continue to deserve our attention, but not in isolation, not first.

[1]These units are relatively easy to assemble, as the examples in the appendix should illustrate. The examples are part of a six-source exercise on Faulkner's short story "Wash," an exercise which appears in a workbook I eventually wrote with a colleague, Nina Chasteen, who shares my interest in and frustration concerning freshman research. To her and to our joint effort, I am indebted for much of the methodology described in this paper.

[2]A sample mini-paper assignment on "Wash" is provided in the apprendix to illustrate the format of the exercise.

Appendix
Mini About "Wash"
Source One:

The central symbol in "Wash" is the rusty scythe which becomes the instrument of Colonel Sutpen's doom. Traditionally associated with time and death as in the image of the Grim Reaper, the scythe signifies in this story the movement of time toward two deaths. The first is the destruction of Wash's illusions. As he literally cuts down Sutpen, Wash figuratively destroys his desperate belief in the possibility of dignity, honor, and bravery in human form. The second death achieved by the symbolic action of the scythe is that of the old South. As Sutpen falls, so does that system which had rested on the rotted timbers of slavery and false chivalry. /89

From: An article in the journal *School English*, volume XXIV, published on July 3, 1978. The article, written by Honoria Smythe, is entilted "Faulkner's Symbols in "Wash." It appears on pages 87-91 of that issue.

Source Two:

Houses are the central symbol in "Wash." Colonel Sutpen's mansion represents

the changing fortunes of the planter class in the nineteenth-century South. Before the War, Wash is prevented by the slaves from crossing the threshold; the house stands as a impregnable fortress of upper-class superiority. After the War, Wash enters not only the house but Sutpen's bedroom at will; the house becomes common property as the sordid reality behind the pretensions of the Southern aristorcracy is exposed. Wash's own cabin, like Wash, is a cast-off Sutpen property, having once served as a fishing lodge for the Colonel. Like the frenzied Wash, the cabin "looked like an aged or sick wild beast crawled terrifically there to drink in the act of dying." /55

From: A book by Marvin Greenspan entitled *Faulkner's Gothic*. The book was published in New York in 1965 by Appleton-Century Crofts (Allison and Chasteen 71).

Assignment on "Wash":
Formulate a three-part thesis, and support it in a five-paragraph mini paper containing paraphrased and quoted material from at least three of the above sources concerning "Wash."

Hint: Concentrate on disputed issues (areas in which critics disagree), or on different symbols in the story, or on the illusions of different characters.

Three-Part Thesis:

Sources Which You Will Use:
(In thesis order) 1.
2.
3.

Introductory Paragraph, Including Thesis:
(Must be two sentences)

First Body Paragraph Supporting First Part of Thesis:
(Begin with an original topic sentence; use paraphrased and quoted material thereafter.)

Second body Paragraph Supporting Second Part of Thesis:
(Begin with an original topic sentence; use paraphrased and quoted material thereafter.)

Third Body Paragraph Supporting Third Part of Thesis:
(Begin with an original topic sentence; use paraphrased and quoted material thereafter.)

Concluding Paragraph:
(Two original sentences of summary) (Allison and Chasteen 76)

References:

Allison, Barbara, and Nina Chasteen. *Research Paper Workbook*. 2nd ed. Edina, Minnesota: Bellwether Press, 1986.

Gibaldi, Joseph, and Walter S. Achert *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 2nd ed. New York: MLA, 1984.

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"Today in English we studied French...": Using Literature to Bridge the Liberal Arts

Joseph F. Bonfiglio

English is a language, and yet, as teachers of English, we deal in much more than simple presentation of a language. We teach students how to use language in written form. We give formal instruction in reading skills such as comprehension and inference. We manipulate vocabulary and associate it with its linguistic roots. We read and discuss successful presentations of our language through literature study.

It is in the study of literature that all of the pieces of English instruction come together and merge with the traditions of history, art, foreign language, linguistics, geography, music, drama, and philosophy. As a student during the late '60's in Providence College's pilot Western Civilization program, I was shown the importance of a humanities approach to instruction, and I have tried to make this approach a part of my instructional technique. I work hard at getting students to see beyond subject area restrictions, to stop creating those false restrictions, and to recognize the connection between the various interlocking elements of the liberal arts. The best way for students to see these relationships is for teachers to engage them in activities which have the synthesis of these relationships at their core. I employ many such activities with my eleventh and twelfth graders.

When my senior British Literature students study ballads, we begin by defining the elements that make a ballad unique. We then read some ballads in Middle and Elizabethan English, and students, in groups of three, set about the task of translating a ballad into more contemporary speech while maintaining the ballad's meter and refrain. To do this, students use the sound of a word to initially determine its possible modern form and then work backwards in a dictionary to find the form of the word as it appears in the original ballad. In doing so, students trace the linguistic roots of words, experiment with the sounds of words, and gain experience using the etymological information available in the dictionary. The same groups are then instructed to create an original ballad to be presented to the rest of the class. Suitable musical accompaniment must be chosen or created. The ballad must be similar in tone and form to those we have studied, although satire is permitted and, in fact, encouraged. Each group performs its original ballad and creates an audio or audiovisual tape to accompany its written draft.

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A project I employ during my juniors' study of "Cyrano De Bergerac" is also based in linguistic analysis, but this time the language is French. I list words on the board which have French roots. We discuss the meanings of the words and compare their meanings to those of the root words. I then list the names of the play's main characters and inform the students that these names are evocative of the characters they identify. I once again break the class up into groups, this time forming one group for each student of French in the room and adding the other students equally. I instruct the groups to write each word with its base words and definitions in a list. Below each element in the list, a short paragraph of explanation is required to connect the base and its definition with the traits of the character involved. Students form a connection between French and English words and also get acquainted with the potential utilization of foreign words or names in writing. As a culminating, somewhat humorous activity, students are asked to create funny, positive names for me and their classmates from their knowledge of other languages.

Names again are the focus of their study of *Candide*, but this time the connection is made, not with linguistics, but with history and geography. Again I list names on the board. These include people, places, and events that are presented by Voltaire, such as Buenos Aires, the Lisbon earthquake, the Spanish Inquisition, Venice, and El Dorado. Using Voltaire's birth and death dates as our only restriction, students are asked to create a map of the world as it might have appeared in Candide's time and to place each person, place, or event in its position of origin. Each student is also asked to create an attached list which includes both the names I listed on the board and the significance of that name during Voltaire's life. Students must employ research skills but must also become geographically aware of the fact that today's history was yesterday's news item.

Just as literature has a connection with history, geography, and linguistics, it is also closely related to art and philosophy. The philosophic trends that shape literature shape all forms of expression. My seniors are first introduced to the Romantic Movement through a lecture on its philosophic roots. We then read various examples and discuss the literature and the lifestyles of its writers as extensions of the ideas of the time.

As an end-of-term activity, the class visits the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, specifically to see one painting, Turner's "The Slave Ship." Sitting around this vivid representation of a sea disaster, students are asked to write if Turner's work is Romantic and if Turner has artistically embodied the same kind of fire, imagination, and independent fury present in the Romantic writers. I per-

mit students to interact while they are writing because the basis of all philosophy is the exchange of ideas.

Each of these learning activities attempts to show the interrelationship of literature, art, music, drama, linguistics, history, and geography. Great ideas cannot be compartmentalized. We need to consciously draw them together. We need to have students actively get involved in this process.

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A Book Review:

Teaching Enviornmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources. Ed. Frederick O. Waage. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1985. References, bibliography, resource list. 191 pages. Paper.

by Kathleen W. Lampert

Central to *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources* is the concept that environmental studies are fundamentally integrative; by reading and writing about their environment, as well as by experiencing it directly, students can integrate theory and practice, science and liberal studies, self and cultural tradition. This holistic emphasis offers educators an opportunity to design curricula-learning environments - which offer students alternatives to the academic and cultural fragmentation our educational system too often fosters.

The writers of the nineteen essays Frederick O. Waage has collected here are not radicals; the courses they describe are grounded in careful pedagogy and creative use of both traditional and less widely-known materials. The essays themselves are arranged in five sections, each preceded by an introduction; the book concludes with twenty-five pages of citations, suggestions for further reading, and lists of additional resources. Waage's introduction provides an overview of the book, and a thoughtful rationale for teaching environmental literature. Subsequent sections, arranged in order of increasing inclusiveness, cover historical contexts, classroom study of environmental literature, writing about nature, environmental literature field study, and regional studies. Each essay includes a brief rationale, a description of methods and materials, a discussion of theoretical and practical problems, and a course evaluation.

Essays in each part range widely in focus, from traditional classroom study to living entirely in the environment studied, from teaching classical literature through science fiction to twentieth century nature writers, from focusing on personal to analytic responses to literature. One course juxtaposes Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* with Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* and Loren Eisely's *The Immense Journey*, revealing the variety of possible responses to nature (54); another juxtaposes films made by the Sierra Club and the U.S. Government about the Glen Canyon Dam to illustrate the rhetoric of environmental controversy (147). One teacher incorporated a weekly writing lab period into a survey of traditional nature writings (98); another asked students to write

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a monologue in the voice of the Colorado River describing the Grand Canyon (105). Some students study the tension between the ideal and the real in the pastoral tradition; others reread "To Build a Fire" during a mid-winter camping trip. The natural world is treated as metaphor, as text, as object of scientific investigation, and as social issue.

Whatever the approach, the essays are distinguished by a refreshing lack of polemic. The writers are, first and foremost, educators concerned with stimulating discussion and developing skills. They share a commitment to student growth, and a conviction that the classroom is itself an environment which can become a model for the environment in which we live. While each essay presents a unique approach to the subject matter, certain themes recur: the use of journals to stimulate student learning, and emphasis on active learning which integrates theory and practice, and a belief that the physical complexity of the natural environment elicits integrated, rather than fragmented, student thinking. Several of the courses described are explicitly interdisciplinary; all are implicitly so.

There are some problems. Most of the essays describe college level courses, so high school teachers will need to adapt both materials and methods to their special concerns. The occasional discussions of financial and scheduling issues, while useful for college teachers, are less relevant for teachers at other levels. The essays themselves are brief, intended to stimulate the reader rather than to provide curriculum blueprints. The editorial comments are sometimes significantly less readable than the essays themselves.

These problems are minor, though, compared to the book's strengths. The authors, most teach English or the humanities, share a sound understanding of current assumptions about reading and writing, treating both as processes in which the student participates actively. The courses they describe are very clearly literature and writing courses; nature writing provides a context for traditional classroom activities. The writers address directly the very real controversy about values: the basics versus the liberal arts, which teachers at all levels confront, offering sound rationales for what might appear to be a radical curriculum focus. Each writer suggests many possible texts, from *Walden* and *The Tempest* to LeGuin's *The Left Hand of God* and Fletcher's *The Man Who Walked Through Time*. In short, this collection is a valuable resource for both high school and college English or humanities teachers, offering ideas for new texts, units, or courses, and for new approaches to materials currently taught. The book as a whole offers a wealth of resources to teachers of literature and writing at all levels.

An Old Way of Thinking New
or
Synthesis in an Age of Specialization

Tim Dunn

In 1945 Albert Einstein said, "Since we have unleashed the power of the atom everything has changed save our mode of thinking thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophy." What a concept; a new way of thinking. The more I considered it, the more sense it made to me. The teaching situation in which I was involved made even less sense.

Background

In 1968, after being discharged from the army, I began teaching again in a public high school in northern Vermont. The world, at least the part of it I inhabited, had changed drastically since I had gone in the army some years before. Surprisingly, the material I was teaching hadn't changed noticeabley, an interesting dichotomy, I thought. At the end of a year I fled, jobless, to southern New Hampshire. A year later I was hired again as a teacher in a public high school. Although curriculum changes had taken place there as they had in most high schools by the late sixties, I noticed that change meant altering labels. Names changed but the content remained virtually unchanged.

During the first summer of the seventies, under the leadership of two enlightened department heads, several of my colleagues and I designed a course for noncollege seniors that was a little revolutionary. There were no textbooks. It was organized thematically, media enriched, without tests and quizzes, ungraded in the traditional sense, and it was team taught. It was fun to teach and it was easy for the students. The students liked it, and, as a team member, it was gratifying; it felt, somehow, positive. However, such a course needed to be able to change quickly to stay relevant to meet student needs in a rapidily changing environment. The system was unable to make the necessary accommodations, team teaching was dropped, and the program withered.

As that program floundered, my department, like thousands of others across the country, developed a system of elective courses. This may have relieved the pressure for change but nothing significant was altered. Basically this not-so-brave experiment provided some alternative literary pieces, many of which would have never been introduced into the standard language arts program. Over

Tim Dunn, an English teacher at Keene (NH) High School, was recently honored by NCTE for his work with the humanities course described in this article.

all, the impact was marginal and the excitement they generated was quickly spent. The standard language arts course, supplemented by some recent literature, picked up students as the electives were deleted. Very few of those courses made it into the eighties. There still had been no structured attempt at synthesis.

During these years I witnessed another phenomenon: the systematic narrowing of student experience and expectations toward occupations. We did not ask students to explore possibilities. We told them to and then built curriculums which precluded them from doing it. In fact, it was during that period that I watched as whole complexes were constructed for the sole purpose of training young people for the job market with the emphasis on materialistic goals. We never addressed the question of whether the occupation would be ultimately satisfying.

As I taught, I thought about what I was doing, about what Einstein said and what students were doing. I was worried. Then I became.....

Bored. That accurately describes my state of mind for several years, as I stood in front of students who outwardly manifested what I felt so acutely. Occasionally they would slip and say something like, "We did this last year."or "I already know how to do this stuff; it's so boring." But most of the time they pretended - because I worked so hard, and they are basically good people who learned early how to get along. They survived as I tried to make the nuts and bolts of English Language Arts Curriculum something more than mechanical sessions of systematic memorization and forget.

Beyond being bored, I felt guilty that the students who were passing through the room on the way to their lives were missing something. They knew it and although they couldn't, or wouldn't, say so, they were frightened about it.

The thing that really bothered me was that they were living anachronisms. At the end of their high school years they were no more at home in their society than they were as small children. That is what should be at the core of all educational thought. It struck me that there had to be a way within the confines of the "English Curriculum" to address, or come closer to addressing, what I saw as that real need. What was needed was some way to demonstrate for them, and then afford them an opportunity to discover, in a meaningful way, the relationships that exist between their society, their own lives, Western Tradition, the arts and sciences and philosophy. In a word they needed some aid to synthesis.

While these thoughts were occurring, several other realizations

were also becoming conscious thoughts. Among them are two that were turning points in my thinking about how to proceed. First, these young people are not young people in the same sense that I was at their age; eighteen in the 1980's is not eighteen of the late 1950's. Their experiences, both real and vicarious, are incredibly different. I will not expand that further. Second, because of their fears about their times and their place in them, a possible strong selling point would be a course which might alleviate some of the angst. What I had hit on was a reinvention of the wheel: an interdisciplinary humanities course.

An Overview of the Course

1. The Text:

During this whole period, I read, at first in a hit or miss way, then later, in a methodical way, what I could find concerning the problems and possible solutions. The first step toward constructing the course was to search out a text that would satisfy my desire toward interdisciplinary synthesis. The one selected was *The Search for Personal Freedom* (Cross, Lamm, and Turk; Wm. C. Brown Publisher. Dubuque, Iowa). This text approached material in the way I had envisioned; the philosophical position was sure, probing, thought provoking and allowed for a natural synthesis. It begins with an acceptance and explanation of the Cultural Epoch Theory as well as some comments about contemporary society which are both thought provoking and challenging. In the first chapter the authors state their credo, "This book has at least two purposes: (1) to help the student begin to find personal freedom and (2) to help construct a new society with a emphasis on human and life-giving values rather than materialistic and repressive ones. Fortunately both can be approached through the arts and philosophy, for they are the means to discover human experience and yield new meanings for that experience and new significance for life itself." This is the stuff of a meaningful education in any period, absolutely critical in the twentieth century and in short supply. Many of my students agree.

The text introduction comprises three chapters: "Prologue: The Intergrated Humanities", Chapter 1, "Toward Tomorrow", Chapter 2, "A Common Basis For Understanding the Arts", Chapter 3, "An Introduction To Music Listening." This is fine as far as it goes, but I want to amaze them and make them aware of mankind's limitations and their own in terms of twentieth century technology. These chapters are not assigned until the third week of the course.

Chapter one demonstrates the need for and the satisfaction in being able to bring order to the chaos of our lives. It does this by pointing out the fact that presently we are between philosophical

systems, that much of our lives are lived without precedent in all of human history. The chapter also points out that this is not the first time in history that man has found himself in this plight. Whenever it has happened, there has been massive technological development and social unrest. With this insight in mind, it is easy to draw parallels to the other renaissance.

Chapter two develops the idea that the arts are an important aspect of life, not at all just one of the finer things. The arts can be studied in an effort to find a sense of direction or place for the individual as well for mankind. By studying them, one feels a little more at home by noticing patterns in human thought and expression. The chapter offers instruction about how to look, read, or listen meaningfully. Students have generally learned something about analyzation in the language arts courses but it seems we have never taught them a thing about loving the work being explicated, or even that loving art, literature, is a possibility.

Chapter three focuses directly on the art of music. The authors point out in vivid terms that music is perhaps the most misunderstood of all of the arts. It is also the most abstract. As with all the arts, music should be more than an emotional bath. Music is an art form that demands a great deal of the listener's intellect as well as his emotions. Dicussions of this chapter can get very lively particularly with students whose musical horizon tends to limited.

2. Approach:

As good as this information is, I feel a need to make the ideas presented even more poignant, especially as these students have a limited view, both physically and intellectually. They have never encountered many of these ideas in an ordered, sophisticated mannner. Because this is the first time, they become genuinely excited by the prospect. One of the first points to be made is that the arts do not happen in a vacuum, that when something happens in science there is a reaction in the art world. The artist's job is to continually delineate man and his place. At this time I explain the process of man's changing place in the universe, from flat earth at the center of creation to his current place on a spinning dust ball so far from the center of his own galaxy he can not yet see its center. While I do this, I mention peices of literature or sculpture or painting that reflect those truths or demonstrate thought during periods of transition.

You may wonder how this begins the process of synthesis. During these discussions, an assignment is given which requires that each student keep a journal in which he records notes, questions, comments, insights, and enters related thoughts on a nightly

basis. The rationale here is Socrates and his admonition that the unexamined life is not worth living. I tell them to think of their journal as an "intellectural roadmap." As is true of any map, if it is to be useful, one needs to know where one is; once that location has been worked out it is very handy to be able to know how one arrived at that point. Because with all of this knowledge, one is better armed to choose a course for the future both personally, and in a democracy, to help direct one's society (the rationale for studying the past in this *Age of Discontinuity*, a book by Peter Drucker).

There is another benefit of the journal; the student writes daily about things in which he is interested. Generally he wants his ideas expressed clearly; he therefore expends effort to do so. That mechanical skill tends to improve without the drudgery that is often elicited by or associated with the ocassional essay assignment.

In addition to this, we discover that, as one begins to notice where he is intellectually and emotionally, he will probably notice that the destination and the route to it will change. That, too, is part of the benefit of the process. I read the journals twice each quarter grading them holistically based on content. I pause to comment and question, answer questions. The journal serves as a conversation directly between the student and myself, an integral part of the course in terms of synthesis based on Socrates and Einstein.

These discussions cover the first several days of school. Each day I pass out to students two or three handouts which relate in one way or another to what we are doing in class; however they are like pieces of a puzzle that must be thought about before they begin to see the whole. In other words, students begin to practice synthesizing before they have even fully grasped the concept. They discover that this is not a new process really. Now they simply realize they are doing it, recording the growth and insight, delighting in the experience. Other than a few pieces which are used every year, the handouts are current, from literary magazines or popular news magazines. The pieces range from treatises on technology to tracts outlining a breakthrough on some technological front, to poems of wonder, paradoxes, and simply reactions to the process of being alive.

3. Supplementary Readings

During the second class, students are assigned two readings: "The New Key" chapter one of book by Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, and "How Do You Know What's Good?"

an essay by Myra Mannes. These two pieces and "Developing an Awareness of the Arts" a chapter from a book called *From Sight to Insight* by Jeff Rackham, which is passed out on the third or fourth day are ones used every year as all three of them contain the germinal ideas upon which the introduction is based.

The first point in "The New Key" is that we are between philosophical systems; thus much of life seems very chaotic as there is no pervasive code upon which to base our decisions, or even to use as a structure guide for our lives. The author states that periodically in the history of philosophy, philosophers come to the end of answering questions posed during their era and they resort to questioning the answers others arrived at during their epoch. In a few words they become intellectually bankrupt. She states that the way a question is stated predisposes the form of the answer. Until new questions are asked, there exists, for the society, a period of intellectual chaos that takes the form of social unrest and quickened technological development. There have been several such periods in the Western Tradition. This current period has been somewhat delineated by the Existentialists. Their formula, however accurate, tends toward pessimism and materialism, neither of which are satisfying humanistically according to contemporary artists.

In the second reading, Mannes points out that there are ways to make consistent and sound judgments about what is good in the arts. She states that an era without standards, or with false standards, demands a great responsibility on the individual. She demands that each of us think carefully and attempt to discover patterns that are as consistent and as old as the stars or the tides. She states that we need to ask questions of the piece, be able to make associations between works, to identify patterns, and to establish the artist's purpose. Mannes also demands that we rediscover and demand craftsmanship.

The Rackham piece offers examples of how one might respond to works of art. It encourages students to respond thoughtfully and insightfully to the works. It admonishes students to think critically as well as with their emotions. A strong theme in the entire piece is that the emotions can be educated just as the intellect can.

4. Video Materials

Lectures are structured around these ideas and the idea that technology is like a wild card in all of this; thus we need to keep track of it and employ its fruits humanisticaly or pay a heavy price, perhaps extinction, if we allow it to be misplayed. At this point about a week and a half into the year, while students are still ex-

perimenting in their journals, and reading through the blizzard of handouts, we spend four days watching and discussing a video tape of an ABC News Special called "A Fire Unleashed" which allows a terrifying vision of two things: what it means to be between philosophical systems and the awesome power that technology has given man. We are indeed the gods that the Greeks worshipped.

This prime time presentation begins with the Einstein quotation cited before. The entire nuclear problem is considered; waste, weapons, and power form the political, social, philosophical, and humanistic points of view. At this point students are beginning to arrive at some dramatic insights in their journals. They are starting to notice connections and they are beginning to sense the true complexity of our age. To add to the idea of complexity lectures and discussions focus on these issues and trace in thumbnail sketchiness the way scientific truth has changed in the last 2000 years. This is done by demonstrating how man's view of himself has changed since he believed that he inhabited a flat world that was the center of the universe. There he was secure; his gods lived on the mountain not too distant from where he resided. Then the world was found to be round, but no less important, continually under god's scrutiny, still at the center of things. Next, the earth moved but the sun was stationary and nearly all else was constant. Today's truth concerning man's place and his relationship to the universe is problematical and filled with paradox, to the point that the existence of a god is difficult to define. We discuss that too and at least some of the ramifications. The synthesis of ideas is manifesting itself in each class by the end of the third week.

All of this material and discussion simply sets the stage for us to begin to respond to the text. Three chapters of introduction are assigned and the classes wade in with an aggressive curiosity that is really refreshing. The work of the previous three weeks comes up again and again as we deal with the ideas presented by the authors. Two films are shown as the reading and discussion proceeds. First "Why Man Creates" is shown and a few days later a film called "Primitive Man in a Modern World" is presented. The first demonstrates the creative process and some possible reasons for it. The second develops the idea of the Culture Epoch Theory and applies it to some very primitive peoples in South America and leaves the question unanswered. Where is contemporary America in terms of the therory?

5. Continuation

After completion of the introduction we begin a chronological survey of Western Tradition. The first unit is called "Greece: The First Humanistic Culture." The unit is divided into five chapters. All of the units are divided similiarly. Each chapter in each unit discusses the period from a different perspective. The first unit is divided: "Early Greece: Preparation for the Good Life," "Hellenic Athens: The Fullfillment of the Good Life," "Greece: The Hellenic Period," "Greek Art: Gods, Temples and Man," and finally, "Music in Greek Life and Thought." Within these separate chapters there is a delicate synthesis developed which the students notice and on which they build. It is built simply: history, philosophy, literature, art and finally music.

Results

Do all students notice and appreciate this presentation of material? No, not at all. Then again, I've never taught a course in which all students achieved equally. In fact this is the first course in which, quite honestly, more students work harder and perform with more success than any I've ever taught. In teaching this course, because there is so much content, I am never bored. It is enjoyable. Students work hard, know they are learning and enjoy it.

In sum, to clarify and close, synthesis must happen twice. First and most importantly, synthesis must happen to the teacher before it can be made available to students. If it doesn't, then the effort is only an act. An act is rarely satisifying or convincing over a long period. Simply because one has arrived at adulthood does not mean that synthesis, or even an understanding synthesis has taken place. The teacher must be able to sense connections between divergent elements, when they are apparent but much more importantly when they are not and can be discovered only through reading, study and reflection. The process can not be taught without the individual teaching it, practicing it. The second time synthesis must be accomplished is in the student. They must be able to do so, now more than ever.

Robert Frost and the Teaching of Summary, Synthesis, Critical Analysis, and Research

Rodney D. Keller

Robert Frost says, "All there is to writing is having ideas" (336). Students need ideas, but we don't teach them to think. Students know how to organize a paper because we teachers provide outlines of how to write as well as give student or teacher examples. It seems that we concentrate primarily on teaching the formula for writing. Yet when students submit papers, the students often have failed to say anything. They just haven't put any thought into their writing. Frustrated, I have searched for a solution. I stumbled upon Frost's "Education by Poetry" where he forcefully says:

> We ask people to think, and we don't show them how to think.... We will give them the forms of sentences and, if they had any ideas, then they will know how to write them. But that is preposterous. All there is to writing is having ideas. To learn to write is to have ideas (336).

I was stunned to realize I had been teaching backwards. I had always known that writing was thinking, but somehow I never made the connection between the concept that thinking had to be taught before writing would work. I now teach thinking before writing. To stimulate the students' thinking so they can write, I use Frost's poetry, and it works well.

Before I explain how I use Frost, I'll explain how I set up my course to center on thinking rather than writing. Instead of having my eight papers dealing with the devices and modes such as having a single paper on comparison/contrast, another on definition, or on cause and effect, I divide my course into four major types of papers wherein students write two papers within each division. These four divisions include summary, synthesis, critical analysis, and research. Within these divisions, I also teach the modes and devices, and the students decide which device they will incorporate into their papers depending on the purposes and formats of their ideas.

Summary

The first division is the summary. Summaries are essential since they demonstrate comprehension as well as force the students to accurately paraphrase a work into an organized, well-written statement. The students must understand what they are reading

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before they can come up with their own ideas. The students' ideas usually come from the reading, so a basic understanding of the reading is necessary; therefore, my students write a brief summary of whatever they read. But before they can write a summary, they must recognize the main idea. I tell them that a main idea is what the author is trying to say, and I soon find two basic main ideas: the "literal" main idea (often the setting and plot) and the "interpretive" main idea (also called theme). The students need to know both. The "literal" main idea is the surface element or message that the author is getting across. I use Frost's "The Pasture" as an example where the person is leaving to go to the pasture for a short time to either rake the leaves or watch the newborn calf. That is the "literal" main idea. The students then look deeper for the "interpretive" main idea where they try to determine what the author is trying to say, to read between the lines. I tell my students that there are various "interpretive" main ideas, all of which may be correct, as long as the idea can be supported through the poem. After just a few minutes, the students begin to think that the "interpretive" main idea is that Frost is inviting the reader to come along with him to enjoy his poetry, and that the reader needn't be afraid because the poet won't keep the reader away for long and promises to return.

The students now do a freewriting exercise where they read a poem and merely paraphrase what the poet is telling them. They are not to include any evaluative or interpretive information. They concentrate on brevity, completeness, and objectivity. For instance, the students read Frost's "Mending Wall." First they find what they think is the main idea and write that idea into a single, preferably short sentence. Then they paraphrase the poem giving support for the main idea. They include as much information as they feel necessary to convince the reader they have an accurate reading. The students then compose a well-written paragraph paraphrasing the poem. Through this exercise, which doesn't take long, the students have learned several important writing principles. They've learned that they need a thesis statement or topic statement (in this paragraph their main idea functions as a topic sentence). They've learned that they need to support the thesis statement or topic sentence with examples from the text, and they need to know that they understand what they're saying. That's a good start for them.

The students repeat the process with several shorter poems such as "Acquainted with the Night" where on the "literal" level, the students come up with a man walking the streets at night or "Design" where the students aren't sure what's going on other

than a spider, flower, and moth are somehow connected. But after they have the "literal" meaning understood and written in paragraph form, the students go one step more and write what they believe is an "interpretation" of that "literal" main idea. What do they think the author is really trying to say? This is when thinking actually begins. For "Mending Wall" some students begin to think of walls; the purposes for walls; types of walls whether physical, social, emotional, metaphysical; why walls are imposed; who imposes them; how can one tear down or build walls. They also begin to think of neighbors, roommates, and family. With "Acquainted with the Night" they begin to ask: why is the man walking at night; what solace is found at night; why is night good for thinking; why does he hear things at night that he hasn't heard before and think of things he hasn't thought of before? And in "Design" they question why was the spider on that flower; why did the moth fly to its death; why was there so much death; what does it have to do with life? (These questions can easily be made from statements about the main idea, and the answers become the support.) The students then take one question they have raised and try to answer it in terms of writing an "interpretive" main idea for the poem, using support from the poem to prove their assertions. They then write a single well-developed paragraph and *idea*.

Synthesis

After the students understand the poem on the "literal" and "interpretive" levels, they are able to develop their own ideas, and writing is underway. Now, I introduce the synthesis paper. However, I need to explain what the synthesis paper is and that the students have unknowingly had experience with synthesis. A synthesis is the combining of two or more sources to support the author's main idea or an individual's interpretation of the author's main idea. There are three types of support: 1) a personal experience, 2) a general idea or theme (their "interpretive" main idea usually deals with this), and 3) another text.

For example, the students use the same poem they used for the "literal" and "interpretive" summary paragraphs. They think of an experience from their lives to either support or refute the idea they established in the summary. They begin to think of when they built walls in relationships and the harm those walls caused, or they think of times they wandered around aimlessly not necessarily at night but some other lonely, forsaken time in their lives, or when they have questioned their lives, or when they have questioned their own existence, purpose, or some seemingly coincidental or

metaphysical intervention in their lives. All they need to do is relate that experience along with the "interpretive" paragraph. This is usually a new step for the students. It seems that teachers before have discouraged the use of personal experiences as support, and I have to work with the students to let them know that I'm serious in allowing and encouraging personal examples. They have begun a synthesis.

Also while developing the "interpretive" main idea, they usually come up with a general or universal theme they are incorporating with the author's main idea, so they have naturally done synthesis. These themes may include: home, decisions, escape, education, myths, traditions, scapegoats, mistakes, relationships, sorrow, turning points, pressure, and countless others. The students take a theme, based upon their "interpretive" main idea and their personal examples, and they have another synthesis.

However, to have the students use all three types of support, they use another poem to illustrate both their experiences and their themes. They must use at least one more source, though they frequently use more. For instance when one student dealt with the often fine line between morality and immorality, he used four Frost poems that for him served as examples: "Vantage Point," "One Step Backward Taken," "Neither Out Far or In Deep," and "Design." Another student explained her frustrations in making decisions and used "Road Not Taken" and "Stopping by Woods." One young man was concerned with the relationships that he was botching up and used the lack of communication found in "Mending Wall," "Death of the Hired Man," and "Home Burial." And another student wrote a moving explanation of her loneliness by using "Trial by Existence," "Acquainted with the Night," "Bereft," and "Silken Tent." The students are able to take the ideas present in the poems and write surprisingly meaningful and significant explanations.

Although the students are still coming up with ideas that are both exciting to them and to me, they still need to have the guidelines of paradigms and patterns to follow. Throughout the synthesis section, I continue my usual conventional writing approach by teaching rhetorical modes and devices. I still teach narration/description, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, definition, classification, persuasion, argumentation, and analysis. But I have a new purpose for teaching these elements. Previously, I taught them as ends in themselves. The students would write a comparison/contrast paper usually on something as mundane as their running shoes and their dress shoes. That was the end of the assignment; they seemed to forget what comparison/contrast

was. But with the synthesis paper, and after a brief discusssion of each mode or device and a small in-class paragraph writing for practice and questions, the students are free to use whichever mode they desire to express their ideas. They choose the mode that fits naturally with the purpose of their papers. For example, the one writing on loneliness, classified different types of loneliness that she has experienced and used the poems to verify her positions. The young man discussing morality defined the terms *morality* and *immorality* through poems. The person dealing with relationships developed his theme through comparison/contrast, and the young woman's paper on decisions was cause and effect. They all used narration and description in relating their personal examples. They all used comparison and analysis in showing how everything relates to each other. The students intuitively incorporate all that they have learned, and they're not even aware of doing it because they are so excited to get the idea down. The students also automatically write a summary of each poem when they write the synthesis as they briefly tell how the main idea of the poem relates to their main idea. They begin to see how elements mesh.

Critical Analysis

After the students have written a couple of synthesis papers, we move on to a seemingly more difficult critical analysis, yet with the synthesis experience, the critical analysis paper is often easier than they had imagined because they already have their own good ideas. They feel more confident. I remind them that a critical analysis is an evaluation; they are not to criticize the poem, but they are to evaluate it. They are to give their opinions of the value of the poem. I still use Frost for this. The students have a choice of one of three questions to answer: 1) How has the writer made his point? 2) How has the writer appealed to his reader? 3) What does the writer value? I remind the students that this is an opinion paper, but their opinions need support from the text. Anything goes as long as they can support it from the poem. The students select any poem of Frost's they like. They determine which general question they want answered and brainstorm many questions and answers about the general question and poem. For example, a student selects "After Apple-Picking" and decides to ask the question "How does the writer make his point?" First, the student must determine both the "literal" and "interpretive" main ideas to determine what the point is. Then the student will ask questions such as how does Frost define *sleep, achievement, satisfaction,* and *work*? What comparisons does Frost use to

develop the definitions? What is the relationship these words share with each other and with the main idea? Are the patterns primarily cause and effect, and if so, what causes what, and what are the effects of sleep, labor, achievement? And what does Frost offer in terms of testimony whether it is common experience, authorities, opinions, facts, or reactions? The student takes one or two of those questions, stockpiles ideas from the poem, writes her main idea which becomes her thesis statement, and writes her evaluation.

If another student were to take "Acquainted with the Night" and ask the question "How does the writer appeal to his reader?" he can ask questions about the poem concerning Frost's logic, his use of emotion, or his use of ethics. And if the student decides to write on "What does the author value?" the student may take "Mending Wall" and ask questions such as how important is the individual in the poem, his privacy, his need for others? How important is knowledge of what is on the other side of the fence? How moral or immoral does Frost consider it to break down another's fence or build a fence? How typical is human nature as Frost is describing the two men mending the wall? And how significant is the concept of walls according to Frost? Although the students are giving their own opinions (and I discourage outside sources), they are able to evaluate the poem using their own support from the main idea, rhetorical modes, and the poem.

Research

After the students have written a couple of critiques, they are ready for their favorite paper of the semester. It is the library paper. It may be their favorite because it is the last paper, but I think what they like is it is unlike any other library paper they have done. I call it the "Me-Search" research paper. The students take one of the papers they have written sometime during the semester and find a personal issue they would like to investigate using outside sources. Most return to their synthesis papers developed around universal ideas and personal examples. They go to the library and find sources they think will help provide solutions to their personal investigation. For example, a student recently experienced a death in her family and wanted to research coping with the loss. She found as her major outside source Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' *On Death and Dying*. Wendy compared some of Kubler-Ross' major concepts and reactions with Frost's poems "The Death of the Hired Hand," "Home Burial," "Bereft," and "Out, Out--" with her own loss. Her experiences, plus outside sources and Robert Frost

worked together to create a meaningful paper.

Another good factor with the "Me-Search" paper is each paper is different and stays away from worn out topics that parrot the same information such as drug legalization, abortion, and nuclear arms control. They have selected something that means a lot to them, and they are able to find out how to cope with their stress, loneliness, competition, guilt, or any other problem they may be encountering. And students are able to use Frost and what they have learned in class. Usually, they have already written the paper previously, so they are merely looking for more support as they work on revision skills. At the end of the semester it seems important to them to research their own concerns and to say something they find worthwhile.

Frost has been the springboard for me because the students can handle him. Frost is deceivingly simple. He is fairly easy to understand on the "literal" level, which is necessary before he can be understood on more complex levels. Since Frost can be discovered on so many levels, the students begin to find enjoyment and meaning in poetry, and they also see the relationship that poetry has or can have in their lives. And the students learn an incredible amount about writing and that writing is basically getting an idea, and once the idea begins to grow, the students can use the rhetorical devices and modes to develop that idea into meaningful and significant writing. Frost and writing have made all the difference in my classes, and I dare say in the writing of my students.

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Information for Authors

The Leaflet is published three times a year by the New England Association of Teachers of English. *The Leaflet* prints articles on all facets and levels of English/Language Arts instruction. Now in its 85th year, *The Leaflet* is the oldest of the journals dedicated to the teaching of English.

Editorial Policy: Articles about the teaching of English, especially in New England, are invited. Classroom teachers of all grade levels are encouraged to share methods that work with their students. Recent research, both formal and informal, on teaching English is of special interest. Reviews of books related to the planned themes are also welcome. Each issue focuses on a specific theme.

Manuscripts: Manuscripts should be no more than 15 pages in length, typed on non-erasable bond, and double-spaced. References should be listed at the end of the article. Internal documentation should be utilized whenever possible. For guidance see the newly revised 1984 *MLA Style Sheet*. Send the original and one copy to the address below and keep a copy for yourself. Please include a brief description of your present position and professional activities. A self-addressed, stamped envelope should be included for return of the manuscript. If you wish acknowledgement of receipt of the manuscript, enclose a self-addressed, stamped post card or send the manuscript by registered mail. A decision concerning the manuscript is normally reached within six weeks.

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On a More Personal Note: The above guidelines sometimes appear formidable to potential writers. If you have an idea on a planned topic, look over recent issues of *The Leaflet* for a workable form. You might like to send me a rough draft for feedback. If so, start the process early enough for me to respond and for you to rework the article.

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